“How do you create quality family time?”

When your kids are young, it’s so easy to hang out together as a family. ‘Let’s go to the park!’ you say. ‘Yes, mummy!’ ‘How about going to Grandma’s for lunch?’ you ask. ‘Hurray! When are we leaving?’

A trip to the zoo? You can keep a five-year-old on their best behaviour for a week just on the back of that promise. Less than a decade later, things have changed a tad. ‘Would you like to go for a walk with us?’ Silence. ‘How about going to Disneyland next weekend, fancy that?’ is met with, ‘How wrong as a mother, but looking around, I discover I’m not much spending money do I get?’ I won’t dare even mention ‘playlist’, referring not to the latest tracks downloaded on your iPod, but fun activities you would like to do when you have a spare minute. Ideas on your Playlist may include visiting your favourite (or new) sections of a book, DVD, or music store, playing cards or board games, singing, dancing, going to botanical gardens, visiting a neighbour, sightseeing in the city, going to an antiques sale, doing woodwork, hiking, bird-watching, people-watching, bowing, DIY, baking, scrapbooking, looking at pictures and many others. These recreational outlets do not need to be cool, practical, either difficult or easy to do – they just need to be something you would enjoy doing. I’ve decided to apply the same concept to my family, in a semi-official way, creating playful rituals and a list of planned activities, to be implemented when we have some time (and money) available. As Psychology Today author Elizabeth Elizardi points out, ongoing leisure time rituals or routines build family cohesion and communication, they require few resources, and are usually low-cost and accessible – a family dinner, board games, movie nights with popcorn, playing in the garden, dancing to music in the living room. On the other hand, novel leisure-time activities on the Playlist are out of the ordinary and less frequent – for example, family vacations, camping, fishing, special activities or outdoor festivals.

Going to the seaside is on the top of our family Playlist – we all enjoy swimming, body-boarding and sunbathing enormously. Theodore, who’s nearly three, can’t wait for the next family holiday – he is practising diving in the bath at every opportunity, but still has to wait a few months before going splashing in the sea. The second favourite family activity is playing board games; a couple of us (me included) are very competitive, so things can get quite heated. Cooking is probably the third favourite – everyone finds their own creativity in the process – followed by, well, the movie nights. I’d love to convince them to watch Jobs... Diana might have to wait for my future daughters-in-law.

A playlist for family fun

A few years ago, I came across an exercise in the book Quality Of Life Therapy by Michael Frisch (see box, opposite) entitled ‘Playlist’, referring not to the latest tracks downloaded on your iPod, but fun activities you would like to do when you get a spare minute. Ideas on your Playlist may include visiting your favourite (or new) sections of a book, DVD, or music store, playing cards or board games, singing, dancing, going to botanical gardens, visiting a neighbour, sightseeing in the city, going to an antiques sale, doing woodwork, hiking, bird-watching, people-watching, bowing, DIY, baking, scrapbooking, looking at pictures and many others. These recreational outlets do not need to be cool, practical, either difficult or easy to do – they just need to be something you would enjoy doing. I’ve decided to apply the same concept to my family, in a semi-official way, creating playful rituals and a list of planned activities, to be implemented when we have some time (and money) available. As Psychology Today author Elizabeth Elizardi points out, ongoing leisure time rituals or routines build family cohesion and communication, they require few resources, and are usually low-cost and accessible – a family dinner, board games, movie nights with popcorn, playing in the garden, dancing to music in the living room. On the other hand, novel leisure-time activities on the Playlist are out of the ordinary and less frequent – for example, family vacations, camping, fishing, special activities or outdoor festivals.

As children get older, it can be tricky to get your family to bond and spend enough time together – but it can be done

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